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ABSTRACT

This guide for study abroad is designed for American college students, and addresses the following issues: (1) the differences between American and foreign university systems and the lack of language proficiency in American students wishing to study abroad; (2) the alternatives to enrolling in a foreign university; (3) the advantages of American college and university programs abroad; (4) criteria to be used in selecting a program sponsored by an American institution; and (5) the availability of financial aid. A list of sources of information about study and travel abroad concludes the guide. (CLK)

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Advisor's Guide to Study Abroad

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This article was first presented by Dr. Baumann at a seminar on work, study and travel abroad held in Chicago in February 1974. The seminar was organized cooperatively by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, the Experiment in International Living, the Institute of International Education, the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs and CIEE. A revised article was subsequently presented at a Southern District meeting of NAFSA Region XII, held in Claremont, California, in April 1975. As a result of these presentations and the subsequent response from participants, Dr. Baumann added some new material to the article and included the bibliography.

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"Can I study medicine in Berlin?"; "I'd like to study a bird which inhabits the Caroline Islands. Am I eligible for a fellowship?"; "Where can I study fashion design in Paris?"; and "Which schools in Ireland offer courses in midwifery?" Not all questions asked of Study Abroad Advisors are as unusual as these, but inquiries do vary, and most of them are about language study and attendance at a foreign university.

The reasons Americans want to study abroad are many, and the educational backgrounds of the prospective students differ greatly. Moreover, it is clear that an increasing number of Americans do not want the if-it's-Tuesday-this-must-be-Belgium type of experience. Many wish to spend a longer time abroad, so that they may become better acquainted with a different culture. Some intend to do specialized study in a field such as marine biology; others think in terms of research in dusty libraries. Many want to "really learn" a foreign language, while others merely want to combine travel with lectures in English on the history and culture of the country being visited. Each person is an individual with his or her own interests, background and financial resources. Luckily, American students have an almost infinite variety of options open for work, travel and study abroad. Students see the Study Abroad Advisor as a person who can guide them through the maze of choices and provide some practical hints on how to find the program best suited to their individual needs. Despite the seemingly limitless variety of questions, the majority of the requests for information are variations on the few basic questions discussed below.

"Can I Study at a Foreign University?"

Perhaps the most common question is a variation of "Can I study 'X' at university 'Y' in country 'Z'?" Unfortunately, most persons posing this question do not understand the nature of higher education abroad, nor do they possess the language skills necessary to carry out the proposed project. One Study Abroad Advisor was queried about the possibility of doing graduate study in philosophy at a Russian university. The inquirer stated unabashedly that he did not know a single word of Russian!

The fact of the matter is that MOST Americans do not have sufficient foreign language skills to qualify for enrollment as regular students at foreign universities in non-English-speaking countries. The French Cultural Service publishes a booklet on higher education in France which begins:

> "It may be useful to point out, although it might seem evident, that in all universities all courses are taught in French, hence the importance of a very good knowledge and command of the French language in order to successfully carry out higher education studies in France."

Many Americans grossly underestimate the time it takes to acquire the proficiency in a foreign language necessary to follow a formal lecture, take notes, participate in class discussions, and then compete on tests on an equal footing with those students who speak the language natively. To a certain extent, Americans are victims of the advertising slogan "Learn to Speak a Foreign Language in Ten Easy Lessons!" It is simply not true that an intensive course of a few weeks or even a couple of months will give oral proficiency sufficient to do university-level work. However, if individuals have studied a language in the past, contact with it abroad can bring it back with amazing speed. In this case, students should count on spending a number of weeks or even months in the host country to regain forgotten skills. It takes years to learn to speak a language fluently, just as it takes a child years to learn its mother tongue.

In addition to the language problem, significant differences between the American and foreign university systems pose difficulties for American students who enroll as regular students abroad. Most foreign universities follow the British or European continental systems; only a few have imitated the American university system with its "liberal arts" colleges. In essence, foreign universities are more like our state-supported graduate schools with their specialization of studies. All foreign university students have passed their secondary state exams and are ready to pursue independent advanced studies in a particular field. Usually a foreign university has no required class attendance. Examinations are few, and contact

with professors is minimal. Most instruction is by lecture. In general, foreign students are responsible for preparing themselves independently for the state examinations. Under the British system, each student is assigned a tutor, who meets with the student regularly to discuss the assignments. Because of these basic differences in the higher educational systems, most foreign universities require Americans to have a bachelor's degree – or at least two years of undergraduate work – before they will be considered for admission. Furthermore, foreigners often must pass a language proficiency test. Some universities also limit the percentage of foreign students who may enroll. Overcrowding in certain fields of study in some countries has resulted in setting admissions restrictions for all students.

Most foreign universities do not have a system of credit for courses taken. Instead, students take rigorous comprehensive state examinations after several semesters of study. Students wishing to receive American college credit for study at a foreign university must make arrangements *in advance* and *in writing* with an academic advisor, so that criteria for awarding credit may be established. In general, this is a somewhat risky business; many American students return to the States to find that their home institutions will not give them full credit for independent study abroad or for unsupervised attendance at a foreign university. Only the most linguistically and academically advanced and highly motivated should try this type of study abroad, if American transfer credit is desired.

If regular enrollment at a foreign university is not a realistic option, what then are the alternatives for the average American student who wants to study abroad? Luckily, there are many possibilities.

"What are the Alternatives to Enrolling Independently at a Foreign University?"

Most foreign universities have special language courses for non-native students. Usually there are no academic prerequisites for admission, and language courses are held at different levels of proficiency. Participants in these classes typically come from a number of countries in different parts of the world – especially underdeveloped countries and the Orient. These special courses are *not* considered part of the foreign university. Moreover, American colleges and universities do not as a rule grant credit for such study, except possibly by proficiency examination for language credit. Students should check with an academic advisor before considering this type of course if they hope to obtain American credit for it.

Some American universities allow qualified students to undertake independent study while abroad. At these institutions, arrangements are usually made in advance for students to correspond with their professors in the U.S., to write reports and papers, and sometimes to take proficiency tests upon return to the States. The Experiment in International Living arranges for students to live with a family while doing independent projects. This option of study is, again, best used by highly qualified and motivated students.

A few private two- and four-year colleges modeled after the American liberal arts college have been founded abroad. These colleges usually offer curricula similar to those offered in the United States. The teachers and students are usually Americans, and the language of instruction is mainly English. Students considering attending such an institution should check into that particular school's record of success in having its credits transferred to institutions in the United States. Further, it should be noted that just because one American college has given credit to one student (who might have been unusually good) it does not follow that it will grant credit to *all* students at the non-U.S. college as a matter of course. One should try to find out how much credit is usually given for a year of study abroad on that particular program.

The best option for the majority of American undergraduate students is to participate in a program specifically designed by American colleges and universities to meet the needs of American students. This type of program has been developed to solve the difficulties encountered in the past by Americans wishing to receive credit for study experiences abroad. Many institutions conduct study abroad programs that offer students a different type of educational experience while minimizing difficulties of transferring credit to the home institution. There are over 900 programs abroad on both the undergraduate and

graduate level in about 50 countries around the world. The programs represent a tremendous variety of course offerings, admissions requirements, credit, housing facilities, language of instruction and travel options.

"What are the Advantages of U.S. College/University Programs Abroad?"

First, credit can be transferred easily. The university programs abroad include standard American academic requirements: regular classes, examinations, tutorials, papers, etc. One or more American professors usually accompany the group to serve as academic advisors and teachers. Native instructors are often brought in on a part-time basis to teach classes. Some colleges even employ resident directors to supervise the administration of the programs each year. In almost all cases, arrangements have been made for the granting of American grades.

Secondly, there are certain travel benefits. Most programs provide orientation sessions, often in a city different from that in which the major portion of the program takes place. Group trips are usually scheduled during vacations, and weekend excursions are often organized. Since the program director is working with a student group, reduced prices and group transportation can usually be arranged. Participants in such programs are sometimes allowed a period of time for independent travel as well.

Thirdly, the director of the group can untangle much of the "red tape" encountered by the students, for example in obtaining visas or in registering to audit a class.

Finally, it is reassuring – especially to parents – to know that there is a program director available in case something unusual should happen, such as a serious illness, accident, or theft of money or passport.

"What Criteria Should I Use in Selecting a Program Abroad Sponsored by an American Institution?"

The first consideration might well be availability. If the home institution has its own programs or belongs to a consortium of similar institutions with joint programs, students should check into these programs first, because it will simplify the problem of transferring credit. Often students will know some of the others in the group – perhaps even the professor leading the program.

The "ideal" length of stay must be determined by the individual. There are programs for the academic year, for one semester, for the summer, or even for a short interim period (often the month of January for those colleges on the so-called "4-1-4 calendar"). If a college on the 4-1-4 calendar does not offer an appropriate study trip abroad, either the Academic Dean or the library should have a listing of all the courses offered during the January interims across the country for which reciprocal tuition and credit can be arranged.

Here are some factors students should consider in deciding how long to study abroad: timely fulfillment of graduation requirements; pertinence of courses to a particular field of study; and degree of strain placed upon personal financial resources. It is generally assumed that the traditional year abroad (usually at the junior level) is the most beneficial. Most programs do not accept college freshmen.

There are several types of programs that fit the interests and backgrounds of most students. Each student must decide, however, which is best for his or her own purposes. The first type – often called an "island" program – is essentially an American campus in a foreign setting. Except for the language classes, instruction is usually in English, and enrollment is often limited to the American participants in the program. Course offerings are much the same as those of the sponsoring American institution and may include traditional courses required for graduation such as American history, introductory ("distribution requirement") courses, or courses in pedagogy needed for teacher certification.

The second type of program is the "partially affiliated" kind (sometimes called the "halfway house"). It is organized so that advanced students with the necessary language proficiency may supplement their

American classes by attending one or more courses at the foreign host university. Usually a tutor helps the American students to understand the material and supervises examinations and papers for the awarding of credit.

A third type of program is the one that is "wholly affiliated" with a foreign university. It provides supervised instruction combined with full-time attendance at the foreign university. Students in this type of program have the closest contact with the foreign culture and university life.

Housing arrangements can be a decisive factor in selecting one program over another. Some programs house American participants in dormitories, hotels or guest houses. Others make arrangements for the student to live with a family, where he or she comes into closer contact with the foreign culture. Some programs leave it to students to find their own housing, which is often quite difficult. Students should decide for themselves in advance just how much contact they want with the foreign culture and then choose a program that provides the type of housing arrangement desired.

When figuring the comparative costs of programs, one should take into account how much college credit is being awarded and weigh this against the benefits offered. Equivalent American tuition for the credit obtained through such a program should be included in comparing program costs. It is also important to find out whether the program fee includes room and board, transportation, etc. or whether the students are expected to meet these costs on their own.

One rule of thumb is to find out whether the organization sponsoring the program is profit-making or non-profit. This is not to say that all profit-making organizations are unreliable, but the student should evaluate the ways in which the tuition money is being spent. An elaborate full-color advertising brochure adds to the total cost of the program! Prospective students should find out where the legal base of the organization is; if it is not based in the U.S., it cannot be sued. Newspapers often print "horror stories" about travelers stranded abroad by fly-by-night charter organizations. The problem is real and so serious that the Department of State has prepared a brochure (available free) entitled *A Word of Caution*, with guidelines for evaluating the services of any work, study or travel abroad agency. Another U.S. Government publication, *Youth Travel Abroad: What to Know Before You Go*, advises students on how to prepare for a trip abroad. Besides basic information on passports, visas and other documents, it includes tips on selecting an organized program or charter flight.

Finally, when selecting a program one should examine the admissions requirements, in order to determine what type of students participate. If an individual's main goal is to learn to speak a language, it is usually wise to select a program with a language prerequisite of at least two years' proficiency, so that fellow students will be able to speak the language. On the other hand, a program specializing in art history or drama with no language requirement at all just might suit some – *if* their other interests are met by the program. It is scarcely possible to overstress the importance of selecting a program in which one's fellow participants have similar interests and backgrounds. Prospective students should ask the program for the names and addresses of past participants and consult with one or more of them. Especially for high school students, some programs have homestays, exchanges and organized travel incorporated into them. One should check into a program thoroughly before signing up and paying a deposit.

"Where Can I Get Financial Assistance?"

This is a vital question which is very often asked. Unfortunately there is little financial aid available for undergraduates, so many university programs have budgeted limited scholarship funds to help participants. Often arrangements can be made for university or state scholarships to be applied to tuition costs, if students go through the home institution.

The Rotary International has a scholarship program for which undergraduates are eligible. The awards are for a full academic year abroad and require a working knowledge of the language of the country. The deadline for application is March 15. Information may be obtained from a local Rotary Club.

The Fulbright-Hays Fellowships (now called the Mutual Educational Exchange Fellowships) are available for U.S. citizens with at least a bachelor's degree and no doctorate by the time the study begins. To apply, a person should be willing to study for a full year at a foreign university and should have a working knowledge of the language of the country. For information and application forms, one should contact the Fulbright Advisor on the home campus between May 1 and November 1 for the *following* academic year. As may be imagined, competition for the grants to English-speaking countries is especially stiff. The funds for these fellowships come from the U.S. Government and from some foreign countries that also send students to study here in the U.S. – hence the title "Mutual Educational Exchange Fellowships." Students not currently enrolled in a university or college should contact the Institute of International Education, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017.

When thinking about study abroad, one should not overlook the possibility of obtaining a loan. The financial aid officer at a school should know if any low-interest, guaranteed student-loan funds are currently available. Some individuals may be fortunate enough to have a relative or friend who would be willing to lend money at a low interest rate. Many professional people have used loans to get through college and graduate work, and study abroad is certainly a good investment in the future.

"Where Can I Obtain More Information About Study Abroad?"

The guidance office or international studies at most institutions has some of the publications listed below. If not, they may be obtained directly from the publishers. In addition, larger libraries often have special reference sections on study and travel abroad.

As we have seen, there are several decisions that one should make before seriously planning to study abroad. Since there are many early deadlines, it is necessary to begin thinking about study abroad as early as possible. It is impossible for anyone to help the young man who wrote one Study Abroad Advisor with the following request: "Please send me information, application blanks, and catalogues for foreign universities." It would take a library to answer that young man's request, and an army to deliver it!

Sources of Information About Study and Travel Abroad

Information on study abroad is available from the following organizations:

Council on International Educational Exchange (general information on study, work and travel abroad): 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017

Institute of International Education (information on study throughout the world): 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017

Further information is available in the following publications:

Whole World Handbook. By Marjorie A. Cohen. 1976-77 Edition. Co-published by CIEE and the Frommer-Pasmantier Publishing Corporation. $2.95. Description of work, study and travel opportunities on six continents. Information on transportation from the U.S., student discounts, where to eat and sleep, advice on travel within the area, student organizations, etc. List by geographic area of work and voluntary service opportunities, as well as U.S. college- and university-sponsored study programs. Includes subject index to specialized study programs. About 360 pages.

U.S. College-Sponsored Programs Abroad: Academic Year. Gail A. Cohen, editor. Yearly edition available from IIE. $4.50 (1976 edition). A list of programs operated by U.S. colleges and universities with description, dates, prerequisites, number of credits, application deadlines, scholarship information and contact person.

Summer Study Abroad. Gail A. Cohen, editor. Yearly edition available from IIE. $4.00 (1976 edition). A guide to special summer courses for foreigners offered by educational institutions in various countries abroad and by U.S. colleges and universities. Includes information on language and culture courses; specialized offerings in such fields as art, music, law or political science. Provides details on admission procedures, credits, living arrangements, costs and scholarships.

Handbook on International Study for U.S. Nationals. Published in 1970. Mary Louise Taylor, editor. Available from IIE. $7.00. A comprehensive guide to study, training and exchange opportunities abroad offered by educational institutions in specific countries. Includes sections on foreign universities, special academic year programs, summer opportunities. 293 pp.

Handbook on Study in Europe for U.S. Nationals. Published in 1975. Available from IIE. $6.95 (paperback), $12.00 (cloth-bound). A comprehensive guide to study, training and educational opportunities in Europe, including a description of higher education in 33 countries and a detailed index of fields of study and where they are offered, as well as information on degrees, awards, volunteer and work opportunities, special educational programs in Europe for foreigners, government regulations and helpful organizations. About 220 pp.

Teaching Abroad. Marjorie Beckles, editor. Published in 1973. Available from IIE. $4.00. A list and description of agencies and programs which offer teaching positions in other countries to qualified U.S. elementary, secondary and college-level teachers. 68 pp.

The New Guide to Study Abroad. By John Garraty, Lily Von Klempere and Cyril Taylor. New York: Harper and Row, 1976-77. Revised edition. $4.95 (paperback). A handbook for high school and college students and teachers providing information on summer courses, full-year courses and degree programs abroad.

Study Abroad. 20th Edition, 1975-77. Paris: UNESCO. Available from Unipub, P.O. Box 433, New York. N.Y. 10016. $7.50. International directory of fellowships, scholarships and awards that can be applied to over 200,000 individual study and travel opportunities in 128 countries and territories.

Youth Travel Abroad: What to Know Before You Go. Revised April 1975. Available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. $ .45. Stock number: 044-000-01571-4. (Department of State Publication 8656). Pamphlet with information about passports, visas, organized programs, charter flights, sources of help abroad, and travel in Eastern Europe.

A Word of Caution. Available free from the Director, Office of Public Information and Reports, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520. Brochure with guidelines on evaluating the services of agencies that sponsor work, study and travel programs abroad.

American Students and Teachers Abroad. Revised in 1974. Available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. $ .90. Stock number: 1780-01377. Published by the U.S. Office of Education, Institute of International Studies. Booklet outlines sources of information and lists services of organizations and agencies concerned with international study, teaching, work and travel. Answers the questions most frequently asked by Americans who contact the Institute for help in planning an international experience. 66 pages.

Cooperative Listing of Interim Term Courses. Yearly edition available from the Association for Innovation in Higher Education (formerly the 4-1-4 Conference), P.O. Box 12560, St. Petersburg, Florida 33733. $1.00. A listing of over 300 off-campus interim term programs in the U.S. and abroad sponsored by U.S. colleges, universities and organizations. 66 pages.